

Work offers no escape

Domestic violence doesn't only occur behind the closed doors of America's homes. This crime pervades every aspect of society, including the workplace. Many victims are working women, and too often the violence follows them to work. Employers have an opportunity and a responsibility to protect these women as well as their co-workers by educating employees, implementing security procedures and adopting model policies.

Prevalence of workplace violence

Domestic violence directly affects workplaces when batterers attack, stalk or harass women at work.

- In one study, over half the battered women surveyed reported that their abusers harassed them at work. (Bureau of National Affairs. *Violence and Stress: The Work/Family Connection*, Aug. 1990.)
- Husbands and boyfriends commit an estimated 13,000 acts of violence against women in the workplace each year. (U.S. Department of Justice, 1994.)

The effects

The effects of domestic violence on the workplace are far-reaching and can result in:

- increased security needs
- rising medical costs
- reduced job performance
- loss of experienced employees

Increased security needs

- Nationally, 94% of corporate security directors surveyed rank domestic violence as a high security problem. (National Safe Workplace Institute survey. *Talking Frankly About Domestic Violence*. Personnel Journal, April 1995.)

Rising medical costs

In 1992, Pennsylvania Blue Shield Institute estimated the **total medical cost of domestic violence in PA** at \$326.6 million — more than the combined medical cost of elder abuse, child abuse and street violence.

Reduced job performance

Domestic violence can reduce productivity at work due to:

- safety concerns
- stalking
- absenteeism (e.g. due to injuries)
- time-off (e.g. for court appearances)

Studies of women who are being battered have found:

- 50-55% missed work due to abuse
- over 60% arrived late due to abuse (Stanley, C. *Domestic Violence: An Occupational Impact Study*. Tulsa, OK. July 27, 1992; Shepard, M. and Pence, E. *The Effect of Battering on the Employment Status of Women*. Affilia, Vol. 13(2), Summer 1988.)

A batterer may sabotage a woman's job performance by:

- keeping her up late at night
- failing to provide promised childcare or transportation
- hiding her clothes
- causing visible injuries

Loss of experienced employees

Studies show that, of those surveyed, 24% to 30% of women who are battered had lost their jobs due, at least in part, to domestic violence.

(Stanley, C. *Domestic Violence: An Occupational Impact Study*. Tulsa, OK. July 27, 1992; Shepard, M. and Pence, E. *The Effect of Battering on the Employment Status of Women*. Affilia, Vol. 13(2), Summer 1988.)

From problem to solution

Employers can take many steps to make workplaces safer for women who are abused and, at the same time, maintain the company's financial stability. Appropriate workplace response to domestic violence benefits both the victims and their employers and moves us one step closer to a society where women and children are safe.

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What can employers do to help?

Employers can help by implementing policies that promote support and safety.

1. **Learn to recognize signs of abuse.**

- **Call your local domestic violence program** for training, information and assistance.
- Address declining work performance in ways that allow for the possible presence of abuse. **Respond with support for victims.**

2. **Make domestic violence a workplace issue.**

- **Educate employees.** Your local domestic violence program frequently conducts seminars and training about abuse, legal protections, safety planning and community resources.
- **Provide training** to security personnel and supervisors about workplace violence and how to handle crimes committed by batterers (e.g. understanding Protection From Abuse (PFA) orders, learning to deal with stalkers/batterers who try to get past security systems).
- **Obtain model policies and guidelines**, available from your local domestic violence program or the Pennsylvania Coalition Against Domestic Violence.

3. **Provide support and safety.**

- **Offer flex-time** so victims can seek necessary services without fear of losing their jobs (e.g. medical treatment, legal assistance, support from a domestic violence program).
- **Accommodate requests** for a change of work schedule or job location.
- **Call the police** when batterers threaten/harass/stalk women at work.
- **Provide additional security** for women who are abused (e.g. better lighting in parking area, escorts to and from the building).
- **Help victims screen and trace harassing calls.**
- **Respect confidentiality** and an individual's right to privacy. Do not disclose information about a domestic violence situation without the *explicit permission* of the woman being abused.
- **Display domestic violence hotlines** and other emergency numbers in public areas (e.g. lunchroom, lobby and restrooms).

How can co-workers offer support?

More than likely, someone in your workplace is being affected by domestic violence. You can help a co-worker who is being abused in many ways:

- **Listen without judging.** A woman who is being battered often feels responsible for the violence, ashamed, isolated and afraid. Tell her you are concerned and that *no one deserves to be abused*.
- **Let her know she is not alone.** Emphasize that help is available. Refer her to the local domestic violence program.
- **Provide information.** Give her written materials about safety planning options.

For more information about safety planning and other available services, call the domestic violence program in your area.

Call your domestic violence program or PCADV

For more information, call your local domestic violence program or the Pennsylvania Coalition Against Domestic Violence (PCADV) at (800) 932-4632. To get the phone number of your local program:

- 1) look in your telephone book's blue pages under Abuse/Assault
- 2) call directory assistance
- 3) call PCADV

A local program staff member or volunteer can provide additional information about available services, volunteer opportunities and ways you can help prevent the crime of domestic violence in your community.



Pennsylvania Coalition Against Domestic Violence

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PCADV TELEPHONE LINES ARE BLOCKED AND WE DO NOT USE CALLER ID